

THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
THE ANTI-SLAVERY REFORM.

“WHAT IS OUR METHOD ?

“ We do not endeavor to organize a political party, because we cannot take any executive, judicial, or legislative office, either state or national, without being obliged to swear to support the Constitution of the United States, which is an oath to give slavery material support. It is wrong to swear to support slavery to-day, even though we hope thereby to be able to abolish it to-morrow. It is wrong to swear to support a wrong, if we mean to keep the oath ; and to our wrong is added perjury, if we mean not to keep it.

We do not organize a party, because politics is a game of expediency and compromise, even in moral questions ; and our motto is, “ Without compromise.” Besides, by acting politically, we place ourselves, apparently at least, in an interested position. The people lose confidence in the purity and disinterestedness of our motives, if we propose ourselves as candidates for office. We prefer to belong to no party, but to appeal to men of all parties, to act up to the highest anti-slavery truth they can appreciate.

We do not organize an anti-slavery church ; not because such an organization may not do very good service to the cause, but because churches, as at present organized, can be formed only by the adoption of some creed, or other statement of religious belief. The formation of a church involves agreement among its members on *many* points ; whilst, as anti-slavery men and women, we agree only in

one, namely, that slaveholding is always wrong ; and, being so, immediate emancipation is the duty of the master, and the right of the slave. Our object is the spreading of *this* truth, and this *only* ; not the truths concerning the trinity or unity of God, the atonement, and other doctrines of the church, though more or less important in themselves. On our platform, all anti-slavery men are welcome, no matter what is their religious belief. In behalf of freedom, we will work with the Jew or Deist, as amicably as with the Christian. With us the Catholic or Churchman finds no more favor than the Unitarian, unless by his *works* he shows a more lively faith.

We do not incite the slave to rebel ; though, according to the creed of our revolutionary fathers, resistance to tyrants is obedience to God ; because no moral question can be settled by force.

We do not, as an association, engage in "running off" slaves. Not that such an act is not perfectly right, and strictly in accordance with the golden rule,—not that we do not honor the heroic Wm. L. Chaplin, who has been willing to risk a prison for the sake of aiding the oppressed,—no ; but because such method of proceeding is extremely partial and limited in its operation, and because it cannot tend to produce immediate emancipation so efficiently as other means.

We do not seek to buy up the slaves,—some of us upon principle, as being a recognition of the right of the masters, but most of us because it would be impossible in this way to attain our object ; and because for every slave we buy we strengthen the hands of the slaveholder, and give him an additional stimulus to uphold slavery. But our method is to adopt every just and feasible way of regenerating public sentiment on the subject of slavery. We form anti-slavery societies, sustain anti-slavery presses ; we publish and scatter broadcast over the land, documents showing the wrongs of slavery ; we hold conventions, and public meetings of various kinds ; and, in all these and similar ways, we endeavor to gain the ear and attention of the people, and to convince them that slaveholding is

always wrong ; and that, therefore, immediate emancipation is the right of the slave, and duty of the master. As our principle is based upon our common manhood, we appeal to men, not as partisans or sectarians, but simply as men, who are conscious that it is wrong for any one to enslave them.

Doubtless many will bring up the oft-repeated objection,—This is to do nothing ; all this moral agitation can effect nothing unless *somebody votes*, unless *somebody enacts a law* emancipating the slaves. Let us look at this a moment ; for no objection is brought forward more frequently, more triumphantly,—none which at first glance looks more valid, and none which, notwithstanding, is really weaker and more unsubstantial.

What is it that supports slavery ? The law, you say. Very well ; but who enacts the law ? The Legislature ! What determines the character of the Legislature ? The votes of the people ! And what determines the votes of the people ? Their ideas ! It is the ideas of the people ; the public sentiment of the people, then, and not its laws, which supports slavery. Theologians tell us that the world existed ideally in the mind of God before the creation, and that it was created as it was, necessarily, because of the pre-existing idea. As it was with the creation of the world, so it has always been with the works of man. They all *necessarily* presuppose certain *ideas*. The constitutions, laws, customs, parties, sects, of any people, exist solely and necessarily because certain ideas exist in the minds of that people. It was the French writers,—those who changed the *thoughts* of the nation,—and not a financial difficulty, which brought on the French Revolution.

Now, which shall we do first ? Shall we seek to change the law by political action, or shall we endeavor to alter the ideas of the public by ceaseless moral agitation ? Ideas are the cause ; laws, the effect. Shall we endeavor to operate first on the effect or the cause ? Evidently the latter. It is impossible to change any effect without first changing the cause. A law which is supported by public sentiment, or the ideas of a nation, *cannot* be repealed.

So long as slavery is supported by the public sentiment of this nation, we cannot repeal the laws supporting it. If we could go through the form of a repeal, it would be disregarded. But a law which is not supported by public sentiment is dead, though living on the statute-book. It is of little or no use to go through the form of repealing it. What but public sentiment in Massachusetts effectually repealed the fugitive slave law of 1793? What was it that abolished villein slavery in England? The repeal of the law of villeinage? No: that law exists to this day as much the law of England as ever; but public sentiment abolished the law centuries ago. We cannot legally abolish slavery in this country, or repeal the legal supports of slavery contained in the national Constitution, until we have changed the moral sentiment of the nation on these questions; and, as soon as we have done this, it will be of little or no use to go through the form of abolishing slavery, or any of its supports, for they will be already abolished. What we want is the will, not the power, to abolish slavery.

Such are some of the reasons why we are sure that our method of preaching anti-slavery truth is the best and only correct one."

[Extract from a Speech, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Association, held at West Chester, October 13th, 1850.]

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